

Davin, Nicholas T.
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"The Springs of National Progress."

A SPEECH

DELIVERED BY

Nicholas Flood Davin, Q.C., M.P.

IN THE OPERA HOUSE, BRANDON,

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 4th, 1892,

ON THE OCCASION OF A BANQUET TO

The Hon. T. Mayne Daly.

Mr. Davin: I hesitate to obtrude myself on you at this hour (after twelve), nor should I do so, but that never before in my life have I stood before so representative a gathering of western yeomen. Another thing which overcomes my hesitation is this: My friend Mr. Ross, in the course of his able speech, touched the weakness of our parliamentary life, of our political life, of our political character—want of faith in Canada. (Hear, hear.) That is a subject of which I have so often thought, by which I have been so much pained, that, late as the hour is, I will venture to occupy your attention for a few moments. Another thing: as I sat here and listened to the graphic account given by my friend,

the guest of the evening, of that exodus of more than eleven years ago, from Winnipeg to where we are now, my mind was stirred with thoughts which it may not be useless to express.

As I listened I thought that hardly any occasion could be more gratifying to me or to any western man with soul and imagination than the present. None could be more inspiring, (hear, hear from Mr. Whyte,) none more congenial to a Conservative, especially a Conservative member of Parliament who had fought under the banner of Sir John Macdonald, to pull down a Government which was honey-combed, rotten with that distrust of the great West of which my friend Mr. Ross spoke; and I may add if you will

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permit me, none more in accordance with the ideas of one who has never failed to advocate the advantage, the justice, nay the necessity, if the country is to progress, of having in the Government young and vigorous blood. (Cheers.) For what are we assisting at? What do we see? A young Canadian statesman who eleven years ago came to this country, a pioneer—like you, like myself a year later—just as the first breath of the civilized world broke on the untamed wilderness, banqueting in this fine Opera House, in this rising young city, wherein wherever you turn you hear the hum of advancing life and see evidence of improvements going forward, and on what occasion? On the occasion of His Excellency entrusting him with the most important department in the Government of Canada, and thus we are celebrating an incident peculiar to the most advanced civic life, where a few years ago the buffalo was grazing, (cheers) and this in a hall sacred to those arts which mark the march of culture, arts which refine, elevate and stamp the civilized man. (cheers.) No scene could be more congenial to me as a Conservative politician who had taken the shilling under Sir John Macdonald, that great man who believed in the North-West and recognized it as the hope of Canada; who fought by his side and under his banner and never sheathed sword until the great victory of 1878; for if that Government which we pulled down had continued in power instead of having on this spot as you sometimes have operatic music, the only music that would have been possible would be the weary canticle of the bull-frog or the idyllic lowings of the buffalo for his mate, (laughter and cheers.) Nor would there be a great agricultural community to give my honorable friend the right to sit in an assembly already second only to that august maternal Parliament, which rises over the muddy Thames in venerable but untarnished splendour and progressive historic renown, (cheers.) I am not therefore surprised to see at this vast dinner men from every part of Manitoba and the centre of the North-West. Brandon may well rejoice, the first city in Manitoba to give the country a Cabinet

Minister, and indeed at this moment she may be imagined as a kind of festive capital, at her board the various western points and centres and interests, glad to see a genuine settler who had fairly and bravely thrown in his lot with the country made Minister. They come as it were to rejoice with you from many a haunt of enterprise, small in some cases, but big with hope, scattered between the Saskatchewan and the Souris; between the Red River and the Bow; from the low lying flats of that rubric stream to those rocky hills which spurning the plain hide their sublime heads in the clouds. (Cheers.)

Sir, as a member of Parliament, who has sat in Parliament with him since 1887. I hail my friend 'Tom Daly' as Minister of the Interior. (cheers.) As a North-West member I hail him in that position, believing that henceforth no strengthless hand will be laid to the administration of the affairs of this great western land and that fruitful methods will tear away whatever lets and hinders western progress; that especially we shall see an immigration policy which will solve the problem of bringing the millions from far congested lands—from Iceland to the Danube; from the Scotch Isles, from Scotland, from Ireland, from England, from Germany, from Scandinavia, in fine from wherever suitable immigrants are to be had, to where above all other countries they have the best chance of making for themselves happy and prosperous homes, (cheers.) We will look to him for a large expansive policy. We shall not expect great results in a year or two years, but in due time we will hold him to his bond and expect the success which is certain to follow wise schemes vigorously carried out. (Hear, hear.)

As citizens of Regina, my friends who are here with me—Mr. D. L. Scott, one of the leading lawyers of the Territories; Mr. J. A. MacCacel, the President of our Conservative Association; Mr. Dixie Watson, the embodiment of all that is most charming in social manhood—we come from the Capital of the North-West Territories to honor our new minister; to express our confidence in him; and, if the conceit may be pardoned, you can fancy

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Regina standing up on her fertile plain, to touch glasses with this young city, born under some well-omened star, this crown of pride of the immeasurable wheat fields, mixed farms, ranches, mid which, with slow but picturesque and fertilizing power the Assiniboine flows,

"Where by mute margins voiceless waters creep."

giving you here in one of its fairest curves, for salubrity and beauty and all that can make up the topography of civic and domestic attractiveness, a site which may with confident justifiable pride challenge successful or at least over-topping rivalry. (Loud cheers.)

I have heard some objections to my honorable friend and the charge in one case is undoubtedly true. I know him well and I am about to give him away. He has been charged with being a stiff Conservative partizan. This is true. How could you expect other than that a Conservative politician coming from "the Wheat City" should prove No. 1 hard? (Great laughter and cheers.) Then his youth has been brought against him. But if I had to find fault with him on the score of age it would be on the ground that he is too old. (laughter.) This is no joke. I mean to say that here in Canada we have grossly, grievously erred by the exclusion of the energy, the hope, the dash, the confidence, the inspiration of youth and youthful minds from our counsels of Government. Talk of youth! Why before the age of the Minister of the Interior men have conquered nations; have wisely ruled great empires; have succeeded in every walk of life. He is past an age at which in all times and all countries men have been held eligible for the highest and most sacred trusts. We take our Parliamentary institutions from England and what do they do there? Mr. Gladstone was a Lord of the Treasury at 25. He has proved himself a very great man; but he was then unproved. At 34 he was president of the Board of Trade. Mr. Pitt was prime minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer at 23. Do you suppose with all his fine abilities he could obtain such a position with us at twice that age? Lord Palmerston, the

greatest foreign minister and the best war minister England ever had was Secretary at war when only 25. He proved to be a great man; but who knew his greatness then? Any way, in a democratic country he would never have been credited with capacity and greatness at that age. Coming having spent his youth in liberal studies and written his poem "The Slavery of Greece"—took office at 26—and at 37 was Minister of Foreign Affairs. Lord Shelbourne was at the head of the Board of Trade at 26. Sir Robert Walpole entered office at 29 and became Secretary at war at 32. Sidney Herbert was only 25 when he entered Sir Robert Peel's first administration; at 31 he was Secretary of Admiralty, at 35 Secretary of War. Fox was only 33 when he became Secretary of State. Sir George Trevelyan when only 30 years of age became a Lord of the Admiralty. Thus out of eight cases that occur to me four held office at 25 or under, and all held the highest offices before forty; in fact seven before 35, and something like half held the highest offices at about 25. Such a thing would be secured in our democratic country to our shame. My honorable friend Mr. Daly spoke of that flag which has braved the battle and the breeze for a thousand years. Yes sir, that flag has been carried in triumph into every sea. There is hardly a country on the globe where under its fluttering inspiration heroes have not fought and fallen and seen the flying foe and raised the British trophy in the midst of the prostrate brave whose right hand was still for every mere. But what carried that flag in triumph round the globe? Was it the aged hand and the aged head? Nay, it was because the young daring heart of England had free play. (cheers.) I don't want to get rid of age. I want to see the wisdom of age and the vigour of youth though in truth the young are often wiser than the old, their thinking being undashed by the doubt and overcaution of advancing years. I want to see the counsel of venerable men married to the hopeful vigour of the young. (cheers.) Therefore I honor Sir John Abbott or Sir John

Thompson or both or the whole Government for breaking away from the tradition of giving portfolios to men 'long passed their prime, so that we have had candidates for Cabinets who might as appropriately have been candidates for coffins. (laughter.) I mean to say there has been too much timidity in all governments, though the pessimism of the Liberal party, rises so vast that it might cast gloom and chill over even heroic spirits. The Grit party never believed in the North-West. But why should their unbelief be allowed to discount the faith of that great Conservative party which is instinct with national aims? Every word Mr. Ross has said to you of the ignorance of this country, want of faith in this country especially among the Opposition is true; and our friends are too much afraid of the poor, penurious, pusillanimous, peddling, pea-shooting criticism—the McMullen artillery they have to face, (laughter.) Let such shoot away, but let us keep our eye on the beacon fires of progress which illuminate the future and light up this western sky and go right on. (Cheers.)

But I forget I am speaking for the Parliament of Canada. I am an advocate. You know I was trained as a lawyer. But I seem to have forgotten the traditions of any profession. Well I have lately not been much with lawyers. As I grow older I grow better and I choose my company. (laughter.) Well then speaking for the Parliament of Canada I thank you on its behalf—and I can assure you it would be hard for you to do anything more pleasing to that Parliament than to banquet one of its most popular members. That Parliament has the grandest opportunities of almost any Parliament of which history offers a record. I am not sure that we always rise to the height of the great argument of Canada's possibilities. There is sometimes a want of breadth one would fain not

see. Many of us seem to have no higher idea of our great opportunities and responsibilities than to pass from year to year like shadows into those legislative halls, and sit there like phantoms of men, and like phantoms pass traceless away. To a few are given opportunities of being something more than shadows and my honorable friend—about whom indeed as I look at him at this moment there is nothing shadowy or phantasmal—(laughter)—has now entered the ranks of these and I hope and believe he will yet belong to that still smaller and selecter band, who rising above the amug enjoyment of what is called a title and a stipend too large by hundreds per cent. if they are unworthy; too small by equal ratios if they are worthy and fit, leave behind them deeds which will constrain the historian in distant years to pause, rub the dust of time from their forgotten graves, and say, here was a man, who in his day did that for Canada which entitles him to honorable mention on that scroll on which nations inscribe the names of their benefactors. (Cheers.)

Still no doubt much good work is done by all though the pulsing song of the lark of broader mornings may strike the tympanums of but a few. Our people themselves are somewhat wanting. Canadians themselves are not conscious of Canada's greatness and Canada's future; but how can we—we who know the west, who stand here, who know what has been done in the last ten years, and who know also what might have been done, fail to realize that the portals of time have been thrown open to admit a new member into the family of nations? And depend on this in this great western land—in this great British colony we are destined to evolve a better type of man a better kind of nation and that even a deeper and more expansive art than the world has yet seen will here call mankind to still higher things. (Great cheering.)

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